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THE ANTI-INSTRUMENT AND OTHER LAWS ON TRIAL

SOME FRUITS OF LEGALISTIC ANTI-ISM

In the May 8, 1956, FIRM FOUNDATION (non-instrument journal), a writer appraises conditions in the non-instrument Church of Christ as follows:

"When I began preaching twenty years and more ago several divisions among disciples were already mature and full grown. Since then they have multiplied on every hand and among every so-called fellowship. They come now with such rapidity that we are made dizzy by the spectacle."

Ira Y. Rice, Jr., writing in the January 10, 1957, issue of the GOSPEL ADVOCATE (non-instrument) says:

"I care not what phase of church function you bring up, from anti-women-teachers to anti-teaching-the-Bible-in-classes to anti-more-than-one-container-in-the-Lord's-supper to anti-Bible-colleges to anti-special-songs to anti-orphan-homes to anti-standing-up-when-you-pray to anti-paid-preachers to anti-this or anti-that—you name the function, and we in the churches of Christ [anti-instrument] can name a faction that has risen up among us during the past one hundred years contending it had to be done just one way to the exclusion of all other ways."

J. L. Hines, writing in the AMERICAN CHRISTIAN REVIEW, says he last counted twenty-six separate factions within the anti-instrument group. This lamentable condition is the logical result stemming from the un-Scriptural division from brethren who employed a musical instrument as an aid to the

singers. Once the flood gates of anti-ism are opened there is just no logical stopping place. J. W. McGarvey doubtless saw the outcome and folly of adding the anti-instrument opinion as a disfellowshipping law and so stated his position:

"I have never proposed to withdraw fellowship from brethren simply because of their use of instrumental music in the worship." (From **THE SEARCH FOR THE ANCIENT ORDER** by West, p. 441.)

Brother McGarvey didn't favor the instrument (nor individual communion cups), but he still fellowshipped his sincere brethren who considered them Scriptural.

IT'S THE GREEK

The highest scholarship in the world testifies that the word **psalmos** (Greek word for "psalm") in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 properly means a song sung with musical accompaniment. So says the eminent Joseph Henry Thayer. M. C. Kurfees (leading anti-instrument author) says that Thayer, "... by the unanimous decision of present-day scholarship, stands not only at the head, but far above all other authorities in the special field of New Testament lexicography." (From **INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE WORSHIP**, p. 70.) Hear what this top-ranking scholar says:

"Syn. **humnos**, **psalmos**, **ode**: **ode** is the generic term; **psalm.** and **humn.** are specific, the former designating a song which took its general character from the O. T. 'Psalms' (although not restricted to them, see 1 Cor. xiv .15,26), the latter a song of praise. 'While the leading idea of **psalm.** is musical accompaniment, and that of **humn.** praise to God, **ode** is

the general word for a song, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, whether of praise or on any other subject. Thus it was quite possible for the same song to be at once **psalmos**, **humnos**, and **ode**' (Bp. Lghft. on Col. iii .16). The words occur together in Col. iii.16 and Eph. v.19." (From THAYER'S LEXICON, p. 637.)

Note that the preceding are N.T. definitions from a renowned N.T. Greek dictionary. Thayer says that **psalmos** designates, "... a song which took its general character from the O.T. 'Psalms' ..." One of the most general characteristics of the O.T. Psalms was that they were accompanied with musical instruments, otherwise they would not have been called Psalms, for that designated accompaniment.

Hard put to explain away Thayer's definition, sometimes non-instrument brethren will admit that **psalmos** carries the idea of an instrument, but that in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16, the instrument is the heart. If that were the instrument, why didn't Thayer say so? Obviously, such a fanciful misinterpretation of Thayer's and Lightfoot's words would never occur to the average reader not schooled under sectarian prejudice. These scholars didn't have in mind the heart as the accompaniment, for they wouldn't have said that a song of praise could be, "... accompanied or unaccompanied. . ." (with the heart) since the heart **must** accompany all true praise.

IS THE LAW OF EXPEDIENCY, AUTHORITY?

(Note: The following argument is presented for the benefit of those who have no access to Greek lexicons. It is based on the supposition that the Greek offers no direct authority for the instrument.)

Non-instrument brethren often ask for our "authority" for the use of an instrument as an aid. They demand that we give a specific Scripture specifying the instrument as an aid before they will concede that it is lawful to use one as an aid. The straits they are in become apparent when the "anti" brethren within their own group challenge them for the authority for their many unspecified aids, such as church-owned meeting houses, pitch pipes and tuning forks, cups, lesson helps, etc., etc. The true issue now becomes apparent: Is the law of expediency, authority? We see only two alternatives, namely: In obeying His will, either God allows human judgment the right to select the best available aids, which, of course, are not sinful in themselves; or else He allows only those aids which are specifically named in the New Testament! It is our conviction, that, of those commands which can be carried out more decently and orderly with the use of some aids, God allows human judgment to select aids helpful in carrying out these commands. Who will contend for only the aids specifically mentioned in the N.T.?

When God gave the command to "sing," did He specify the standard or details to be employed to enable a heterogenous assembly of people (most of whom lack musical training) to sing together in an orderly manner? Our answer is NO! Therefore, the means we use to achieve togetherness in singing is left to human judgment, and this by necessary inference. Some use a pitch pipe (no Scripture for this mouth organ) to get the pitch, and many use a song director, who, with his voice and motions (waving) directs in song. Others employ a musical instrument to guide the singers in correct tune and tempo. We may differ in our choice of aids, but our practice testifies that we all believe that some aids are highly useful to achieve order-

ly singing! The particular aids we choose come by our own wisdom and **not** by a "Thus saith the Lord." We are all **one** in this fact! Since **human judgment** is the only real authority non-instrument people have for their many aids, how can their authority (human judgment) exclude the instrument for others?

PRACTICE NOT QUESTIONED

Non-instrument brethren often assert: "Our practice is not questioned; all admit it is safe to sing without the aid of a musical instrument." (Other "antis" say the same thing about church-owned buildings, cups, pitch pipes, lesson helps, etc., etc., that it is safe not to have them.) **But** their practice **does not stop there!** Their practice includes not only opposing certain commonly used aids and expedients, but also **disfellowshipping all those who fail to observe their human creed.** One might safely ride a bicycle to church every Lord's Day, but, if in addition, he had the **added** practice of **disfellowshipping** all others who chose some other mode of transportation, I surely would question **that!** Likewise, I do not question the right of brethren not to use musical instruments, cups, lesson literature, pitch pipes, church-owned buildings, etc., if they so choose; but I surely **do** question the practice of **adding a disfellowshipping law to the gospel** and dividing the church against those who find these aids very helpful in carrying out God's commands decently and in order.

ANOTHER KIND

Anti-instrument brethren often object to using a musical instrument as an aid to the singers on the ground that an instrument makes **another kind** of music, compared to singing (vocal music) which God commanded. Practically applied, if I hired a carpenter and told him to build me a house out of **redwood**, then he should understand that it would be wrong for him to use a **pine house**

Pine into house

for tools and materials, a **fir** sawhorse, a **hickory** hammer handle, a **maple** workbench, etc., to assist in the building of the house. Who can believe that such a principle is Scriptural or even reasonable?

But, our anti-instrument brethren don't even practice the principle they preach. Their song books contain **written music**, which is **another kind** of music compared to singing; also, the song book is **another kind** of **book** compared to the Bible. Must the song book go?

What about the pitch pipe? It gives out a **mechanical pitch**, which is **another kind** compared to vocal pitch, which is involved in singing. Must the pitch pipe go?

Most non-instrument brethren use **un-inspired literature** (lesson helps), but some (called "antis" by the users) oppose it on the ground that it's **another kind** of literature, compared to the Bible, which is **inspired**. With reference to the instrument, why can't our dissenting brethren understand that we are dealing with a realm (expediency) where God specified **no "kind"** at all? It seems they can see this when it comes to **their** many unspecified aids!

Some try to excuse themselves for using this **different kind** of literature (lesson helps, journals, etc.) by saying that it's merely one method of teaching. It is strange that they can't see that a musical instrument can also be used as a method of teaching the **tune**, that which is inherently a part of the song. Notes in the song book guide the singers by eye (to those trained to read them). To those not so trained (this includes the majority), those same notes, **transformed into** sound, serve very well to guide the singers by ear. Just what is wrong with that?

ANTI-ISM GONE TO SEED

It is reported that a few anti-instrument brethren have opposed church-owned meeting

houses. Many would call them cranks, but they would only be following anti-ism to its logical conclusion. Reasons for opposing church buildings could be summed up as follows:

1. There is neither Scriptural authority nor precedent for Christians to build or buy church buildings.
2. God gave instructions regarding the building of houses for religious worship in the O.T., but left such instruction out of the N.T.
3. History reveals that Christians in apostolic times did not build special church buildings. (See Neander's or Mosheim's Church History.)
4. To own property, as a church, necessitates a departure from the simple N.T. church organization, in that it demands the adding of "trustees" (an unauthorized office—**another kind** when compared to elders and deacons) to the church officary.
5. Church buildings minister to pride and worldliness.
6. The N.T. commands Christians to build up a **spiritual** house (the church) and **not** a **material** house. Since the N.T. specifies the **kind** of house that is to be built up, those who build up a **material** house are building up **another kind** of house; therefore, it's an **addition** and not an aid.
7. Those of us who worship in church buildings are guilty of dividing the church, and keeping it divided, in that we can admittedly worship with them in their homes (their practice being unquestioned, for, "The church in thy house," is Scriptural); but it offends their conscience to attempt worship with us in our unauthorized church buildings.

argues for and in parallel

Now, if it is sinful to use an instrument as an aid to the singers, on what grounds can most non-instrument people **consistently** claim that they have authority for their many aids including the church-owned building? They may reply that the instrument is not parallel to the church-owned building. To be sure, there are some dissimilarities between them. Most aids differ among themselves, but does that fact make them sinful? If so, how are we to determine which aid is to be used as the pattern or model by which all other aids are to be judged? The fact is that most aids are parallel in the most important respect, that they come by **human judgment** and not by a, "Thus saith the Lord." Thus, the essential authority for them is the same!

CONCLUSION

Let us get back on that road to having "one body." Away with the sectarianism over differences where human judgment must speak. In matters of faith, **unity**; in matters of opinion, **liberty**; in all things, **charity**.

PRAYER: Lord, help us all to demonstrate,

"That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."—Thomas Campbell.

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